



# Maryland Chiefs of Police Association

## Maryland Sheriffs' Association



### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** The Honorable Anne R. Kaiser, Chair and  
Members of the Ways and Means Committee

**FROM:** Chief David Morris, Co-Chair, MCPA, Joint Legislative Committee  
Sheriff Darren Popkin, Co-Chair, MSA, Joint Legislative Committee  
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

**DATE:** February 3, 2021

**RE:** **HB 496 Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act)**

**POSITION:** **OPPOSE**

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) **OPPOSE HB 496**. This bill redirects \$10 million currently used to ensure adequate local law enforcement coverage at schools across the State to instead be used for hiring or contracting to establish or expand various mental health services.

A school resource officer is a law enforcement officer who works closely with administrators in a school setting to create a safer environment for students and staff. In this role, the SRO also provides mentoring and conducts presentations on youth related issues. Because of this broader role in a school system, an SRO participates in a specialized training program designed specifically for working with students in a school setting. This training curriculum includes Maryland school law, trauma-informed counseling, restorative practices, relationship building, and peer mediation techniques. To employ the skills taught through this training an SRO must work in the school system, engage with students, build positive relationships, and direct students to resources. For many students, an SRO is a positive role model in which they trust and confide. These strong relationships build community trust and understanding and improve safety in the school environment.

In 2018 after school shootings at Stoneman Douglas in Florida, and closer to home at Great Mills High School in St Mary's County during which a well-trained School Resource Officer confronted the active shooter, the General Assembly passed Maryland's Safe to Learn Act. This bill directly threatens the \$10 million in funding provided through this Act to ensure adequate law enforcement coverage to keep Maryland's students safe. Further, the statutory requirement to provide SROs or adequate school coverage remains, although the funding would be eliminated for that purpose.

Maryland law enforcement has many outstanding SROs among its ranks, including one who was recently named National School Resource Officer of the Year. MCPA and MSA urges the Committee not to take steps that would harm the great work of these officers.

For these reasons, MCPA and MSA **OPPOSE** HB 496 and urge an **UNFAVORABLE** report.